

DMH EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT – NATHANIEL J. SHAW

Continuing our stories that spotlight LACDMH employees who shine, this week we're featuring...

NATHANIEL J. SHAW

Mental Health Advocate, Older Adult System of Care Bureau



Nathaniel “BeBop” Shaw started working for the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (LACDMH) in April 2015. He is a Mental Health Advocate with the Older Adult System of Care Bureau at headquarters.

As a Mental Health Advocate, he is responsible for outreach to older adults, helping them with any issues or problems they may have. While he is not a clinician, he is empathetic by sharing his own lived experience with mental illness.

Nathaniel was born and raised in Seattle. He dropped out of school and spent time in prison in the 1970s and 1980s. While in prison, he got his GED, completed two associate degrees, and discovered his love of art. He became sober in 1992, and wrote a book about his own drug addiction; how he overcame it to start life with a clean slate.

What do you like about your job? There are a number of things that provide satisfaction for me here at LACDMH. I want to focus on being part of a productive team that allows me to feel the essence of that ‘second chance.’ Being part of a team that helps people is very inspiring to me. It makes me feel not only wanted but needed. That feels great!

Who/what inspires you? As a black man in my sixties, I have seen a lot. I have witnessed the struggles, from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, to President Barack Obama’s goal of equality for everyone. These leaders and my experience have inspired me.

What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? Art. The first day I experienced a prison cell, I found pastels on canvas. The theme in my art is built around the music that helped save me as a kid. So, I put as many of the images I knew as a kid and young adult on canvas. To date, I have managed to keep at least 50 canvases with a message of music in my collection. Poetry is also something that keeps my mind busy and is useful in expressing my feelings.



WELCOME TO MY ABODE
By BeBop (Nathaniel J. Shaw)

One thing I would ask that you not unload;
Is "why the stubbornness as an artist does not commercially unfold?"
Many have their own stories of their lives.
Mine is just as unique and used today so I may continue to somehow survive;
In a world I've made possible including all the power steering drive.
Please; instead ask me "if it is I'll ever try to sell my love in art and all its work;"
And not take for granted that I'm just being a stupid jerk?
That question can be answered with the help of God above and whatever plans he has for me
on his turf.
A message I want to convey;
Through all the love and its creation on canvas in continued play;
Is the faith not to let real love turn into what can easily decay?
Recall or note that spirit in us allowing one to pray.
Staying in such contact will allow one to relay;
And as well portray;
A definite way, day by day.